

An e-Portfolio-based Model for the Application and Sharing of College English ESP MOOCs

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Abstract

The informationalized knowledge sharing of MOOCs not only promotes the change of teaching concept and the reform of teaching methodology, but also provides a new opportunity for the teaching resource integration and sharing between different universities. The present study has constructed an e-Portfolio-based model for the application and sharing of college English ESP MOOCs. In this model, college English ESP MOOCs developed by different universities have been put into the e-Portfolio-based platform for application and sharing, and those MOOCs will be applied in the specific ESP teaching and learning processes. It is hoped that the application of the model will accelerate the development, application and sharing of teaching resources, and the coordination and innovation of knowledge between universities, and advance the professional interaction and the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents based on formative assessment.

Keywords: e-Portfolio, college English, ESP MOOCs, application and sharing

1. Introduction

In the information society, educational informatization has developed into informative education. The traditional informatization as an auxiliary method for foreign language teaching has gradually developed into a method of informative foreign language teaching. This is a process of concept updating, technical development and teaching refinement. Great changes have also taken place in foreign language teaching environment, in which information technology should be utilized to digitalize and to improve traditional teaching modes with the purpose of improving foreign language learning efficiency and sharing teaching resources. Therefore, innovation of teaching, multi-media teaching materials, information sharing and autonomous learning have become the important features of the current college English reform.

Both *College English Curriculum Requirements* (CECR) (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2007) and *College English Teaching Guidance* (CETG) (Ministry of Education of PRC, forthcoming) highlight that the reform of college English teaching in China should be based on modern information technology. In CECR, it is stressed that towards individualized and autonomous learning, new teaching models should be supported by modern information technology, particularly the network technology in order that English teaching and learning are to some extent not bound by time or restricted by place. In accordance with CETG, teachers should be encouraged to construct and to utilize Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro-lectures or online high-quality educational resources to reform teaching practices and expand teaching contents. As a matter of fact, the phenomenon of MOOCs has spread with amazing speed. Many universities are now joining up with MOOC providers to allow free access to courses and participant numbers for an individual course have been widened (Boyatt et al., 2014). Thus, teachers can implement blended teaching based on classroom, MOOCs or flipped classrooms to bring students to the active, autonomous and individualized learning. Characterized by operability and mobility, online interaction and learning platforms should also be built to achieve human-computer interaction and human-human interaction, record and monitor students' learning processes, and provide teachers' and students' feedback timely. The construction of online courses should be taken into consideration, aiming at developing an efficient mechanism for co-construction and sharing of teaching resources. Therefore, college English teaching should take good advantage of modern information technology to co-construct and integrate resources and thus build up online interactive learning platforms.

CECR and CETG also suggest that formative assessment should be applied into college English teaching. Formative assessment is a progressive and developmental assessment used in teaching processes. Based on teaching goals, a variety of assessment methods and forms are employed to track teaching processes, offer teaching feedback, enhance students' ability of autonomous learning and promote students' all-around development (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2007). One important form of formative assessment is to construct students' learning portfolios. In light of constructivism, during thee-Portfolio-based assessment, modern information technology is used for automatically collecting, organizing and showing the information in portfolios (Li & Zhang, 2011). Modern information technology supports the construction of autonomous learning platforms, improves students' performance in their English courses, and cultivates students' ability of exploring knowledge and learning in dependently.

CETG emphasizes that universities should encourage students to learn English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which includes such courses as marketing English, financial English, medical English, legal English, sports English, maritime English and so on. ESP courses demonstrate the instrumental feature of college English. CETG points out that the instrumentality of college English is characterized in ESP courses, and students can learn English for academic or professional purposes that are related to their majors or future careers and to acquire communicative competence in their future academic or professional fields. Wang (2013) argues that the instrumentality and humanity of college English courses have laid a solid foundation for ESP courses. ESP courses can help to integrate professional teaching and foreign language teaching deeply, which has practical significance in and long-term positive effect on students' future development and advance the cultivation of internationalized talents efficiently.

Therefore, taking college English teaching reform in Guangdong Province in China as an example, the present study will discuss how an e-Portfolio-based model will be constructed for the application of ESP MOOCs to promote the MOOCs sharing, teaching and assessment, and to improve college English teaching efficiency and quality.

2. The Status Quo of ESP and e-Portfolio

2.1 ESP Teaching and MOOC Construction

With the rapid development of economy, science and technology, China has furthered her reform in college English, which has been associated with occupation, academy and employment. In order to meet a variety of learners' needs in China, ESP has gradually become one kind of college English courses (Wang, S. & Wang, H., 2011; Wang, 2013). As a matter of fact, ESP teaching practice and research in China are still in a very early stage. The consensus on ESP has not been achieved in academic world in China. Moreover, because college English credits have been generally compressed, many colleges and university have begun to reduce the credits of English for General Purposes (EGP) and to launch school-based ESP courses for their talent-cultivating programs and goals, with the attempt to teaching ESP characterized by bottom-up reform (Cai, 2015). Therefore, there are still a lot of problems in ESP teaching and resource construction, such as limited teaching time, lack of competent teachers, lack of intercollegiate cooperation, and teaching inefficiency. In particular, the construction and application of ESP resources need to be strengthened urgently.

Considering the fact that Guangdong Province is situated at the forefront of the reform and opening-up in China and the status quo of Guangdong college English teaching reform, Guangdong College English Teaching Advisory Board (GCETAB) realizes that a top-down commitment to ESP teaching reform is needed and the construction, application and sharing of ESP resources are necessary. This will help to achieve a deep integration of professional teaching and English teaching and to realize the goal of cultivating internationalized talents.

At present, the construction and sharing of college ESP teaching resources is expected to be accomplished through MOOCs. The distinctive feature of MOOCs helps achieve the interaction and sharing of knowledge successfully. And the diversity of MOOC resources makes it easier in the Big Data era to integrate a variety of social networking tools and digital resources (Chen, 2015). MOOCs are characterized by openness, which breaks the constraint of time, and makes MOOCs easier for more and more learners to use (Chen, 2016a; Cormier & Siemens, 2010). MOOCs are also featured by learners' voluntary participation, i.e., learners can complete the courses independently or conduct peer assessment conveniently (Xu, 2015), and MOOC learners have their own preferred modes of communication based on their "level of English language proficiency, gender, level of education, and age, and did so in the context of a MOOC on creativity and innovation" (Zhang et al., 2016), which guarantees the effective utilization of such resources.

Pursuant to Constructivism, autonomous learning cannot separate from resource-based learning in modern information society. Therefore, the implementation of MOOC-based construction, application and sharing of

ESP digital teaching resources can advance the ESP development and improve students' autonomy in learning. However, lack of support for MOOCs has become a great concern (Boyatt, Joy, Rocks, & Sinclair, 2014) in the field of college English teaching and research. In order to support the effective development and construction of college English courses, to accelerate and strengthen the construction of college English MOOC curriculum and resources, and to promote the cooperation among universities and the sharing of college English resources, GCETAB has commenced to organize and construct MOOC resources, making ESP a priority. In more than 20 universities that offers a variety of ESP courses, MOOC resources of over 10 ESP courses are under construction or have already been established.

Despite the fact that GCETAB attaches great importance to ESP teaching reform and that the construction of college English ESP MOOC resources in universities is in full swing, the development of college English ESP courses in different universities has been rather uneven, the construction and sharing of resources is lagging behind. The MOOC resources established have not been fully utilized (Chen, 2011; Chen, 2016b). Nowadays, "Information and Communication Technologies have triggered the innovations of pedagogies and learning methods in all levels of education", and "e-Learning is expected to improve classroom teaching through educational tools and digital content in various blended approaches" (Yamada, 2016). Meanwhile, MOOCs, different from a traditional classroom approach, should be designed to accommodate the specific context with its heterogeneity of learner needs and put the learner center-stage in a networked learning environment (Brouns, Teixeira, & Morgado, 2017). Thus, it is imminent to develop a MOOC sharing model for e-Learning in teaching practices.

2.2 Research and Application of e-Portfolio Platform

The theoretical basis of portfolio-based learning is to interpret language acquisition as a treatment of social constructivism (Barrett & Carney, 2005). The language acquisition concept in social constructivism suggests that learners should learn actively and interact with learning materials and learning events. This interaction can help learners understand those learning materials and learning events, and find solutions to the problems during their learning processes by themselves (Jones & Shelton, 2006). Since it is an important approach to formative assessment which collects students' work in the learning process to demonstrate one's effort, progress and achievement in one or more areas (Chan & Yan, 2013), portfolio assessment highlights that learning responsibility should be taken by students themselves (Hewett, 2004). Teachers are only instructors in students' autonomous learning while students themselves are the real planners and implementers of their learning activities. The academic achievements largely reflect students' autonomy in learning (Slavin, 1994; Paris & Ayres, 1994; Kwok & Chan, 2012).

With the dramatic development of science and technology, the newborn e-Portfolio assessment makes up for limited storage capacity of traditional portfolio (Barrett, 2010). Through e-Portfolios, students can submit more abundant learning materials, such as videos, photos, recordings and other multimedia files (Rounds, 2002). E-Portfolios have promoted the flexibility and the creativity in the teaching and learning processes and made learning interaction more timely and more convenient (Stefani et al., 2007).

In other countries, especially in USA, e-Portfolios are very common and specific institutions to develop e-Portfolios have been established (Xiong, Ouyang, & Zhu, 2011). In China, although e-Portfolio assessment has been introduced by some scholars (e.g., Zhang & Wang, 2004), its research and application are still at the exploratory phase and not popularized effectively. Teachers and students are still unfamiliar with the purposes, methods and operations of e-Portfolios. Recent literatures mainly concern how e-Portfolios are used to advance the reform of teaching models (e.g., Long, 2009; Li, 2011; Zhu & Yu, 2011) or teacher professional development (e.g., Liu, 2008; Ma, 2010; Li, Guan, & Zhu, 2013). But few literatures have focused on how an e-Portfolio system will be constructed and applied for English teaching, and the researches and the practices of e-Portfolio-based resource application and sharing have been left untouched. Given that e-Portfolio platforms can make the operation of formative assessment easier, and that the characteristics of networking in both MOOCs and e-Portfolios can lay the foundation for their integration, the application and sharing model of MOOC resources are expected to be achieved through e-Portfolios.

In view of this situation, the present study will construct an online e-Portfolio platform based on the principles of portfolio assessment and characteristics of ESP courses. The aim lies in the integration of the platform construction, the model formulation and the resource co-construction and sharing to promote teaching professionalism and students' autonomy in learning, to assist extracurricular teaching, and to improve teaching quality of college English ESP courses in Guangdong Province. The following questions will be discussed: (1) What functions and characteristics do the online e-Portfolio platform to be developed have? (2) Can the future

e-Portfolio platform incorporate college English ESP MOOCs? (3) How can teachers and students utilize college English ESP MOOCs through thee-Portfolio platform? (4) How can different universities share and update college English ESP MOOCs through the e-Portfolio platform?

3. Construction of an e-Portfolio-based Platform for Applying and Sharing ESP MOOCs

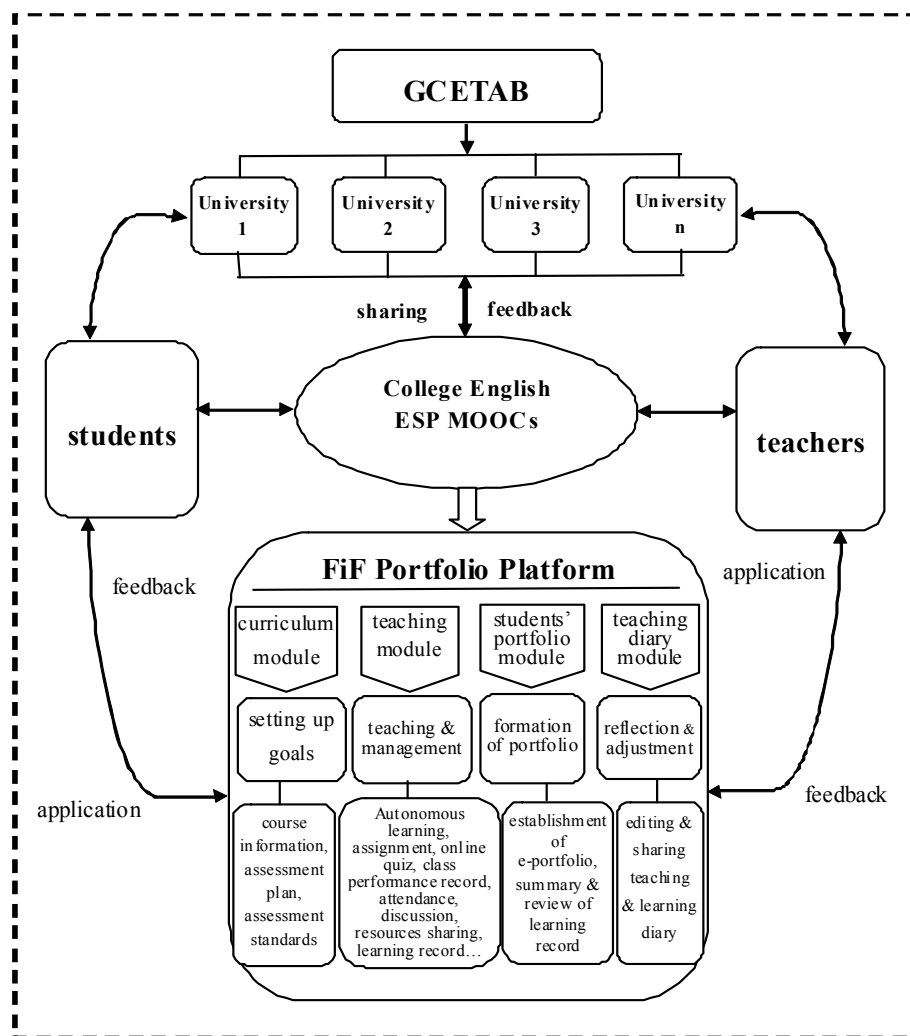


Figure 1. An e-Portfolio-based FiF Model for applying and sharing college English ESP MOOCs

Just as e-Portfolio platforms are often constructed by assembling function modules (Xiong, Ouyang, & Zhu, 2011), the present study will construct an e-Portfolio platform focusing on college English learning process to facilitate students' autonomous learning (see Figure 1). It will also conduct co-construction, application and sharing of college English ESP MOOCs based on the e-Portfolio platform to be developed, aiming to advance college English ESP teaching reform, to promote the efficiency and the practicability of ESP teaching, and to facilitate constructing, applying and sharing college English ESP resources through the integration of e-Portfolios and college English ESP MOOCs.

3.1 Developing an e-Portfolio-based FiF Platform for Formative Assessment

In the situation that GCETAB strongly advocates and advances the teaching reform based on formative assessment, FiF Teaching Assessment System (FiF Platform) (FiF is the abbreviation from the slogan "For Ideal Future") is developed by Beijing FiF Education Technology Co., Ltd. FiF is a multi-terminal online teaching management system based on the concept of formative assessment and the teaching practices in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS), and an e-Portfolio assessment platform used to achieve students' autonomy in their learning of college English courses. In the teaching and learning processes, FiF Platform

mainly assists teachers to plan for appropriate assessment of students' daily performance, to accumulate students' scores automatically and to form students' traceable e-Portfolios. FiF Platform also serves to encourage students to identify their learning goals, attach much importance to their learning processes, participate in the assessment and become assessment subjects, which will promote students' enthusiasm for autonomous learning. Moreover, FiF Platform can help universities implement formative assessment, construct multiple teaching evaluation systems and explore new models for teaching reform.

Specifically speaking, FiF Platform has four functional modules that support every process of formative assessment, including the establishment of teaching goals, the development of mixed teaching and management, the formation of e-Portfolios, teaching reflections and adjustments. (1) Curriculum module helps the teachers in the same course group easily establish course information, assessment plan and assessment standards; (2) Teaching module supports online autonomous learning, assignment giving and checking, online tests, classroom performance recording, attendance checking, classroom discussion, resource sharing, learning record checking, and other teaching or management activities; (3) Students' portfolio module serves the establishment of e-Portfolios, the collection and review of learning records; (4) Teaching diary module supports the editing and the sharing of teaching and learning diaries for the improvement of teaching and learning.

FiF Platform has four characteristics: (1) Formative assessment: Firstly, it emphasizes goal-driven teaching and learning; secondly, it advocates teaching reflection which helps to diagnose the gap between teaching effects and teaching goals. (2) Student-centered: Students can set up learning plans and goals in their portfolios, participate in the teaching process through self-assessment and peer assessment, engage in teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions through resources sharing and class discussion, and accumulate their own e-Portfolios with the development of teaching activities. (3) Connection between teaching activities in classroom and beyond: It supports mixed teaching, i.e., teachers and students can use the system to expand off-line classroom teaching to online autonomous learning, e.g., quiz, assignment, discussion, sharing of resources and other activities. (4) Accumulation of students' scores: It can calculate students' scores quickly for the assessment of their daily performance and autonomous learning. Teachers only need to set up the assessment plan while FiF Platform automatically accumulates every assessment result, which will largely reduce teachers' manual counting work and will to some extent enhance students' enthusiasm for learning.

3.2 Embedding MOOCs into FiF for the Implementation of ESP Teaching

FiF Platform has taken resource embedding into consideration. When college English MOOCs are integrated into the portfolio platform, three things are seriously taken into consideration:

Project-based construction. At present, ESP MOOCs are still at the progress of construction, aiming to addressing the problems in ESP Teaching. It can serve as a supplement for limited teaching time and teaching resources. It can also teach students in accordance with their aptitude and change the teaching and learning models. Moreover, it can further encourage students' enthusiasm to learn ESP courses and help to cultivate their autonomy in learning. Under the guidance of GCETAB, universities have started to construct college English ESP MOOCs in all rounds. Many universities have set up a dedicated team to speed up the construction or uploaded the completed MOOCs onto FiF Platform.

Organization and implementation. College English teachers in Guangdong Province have begun to use ESP MOOCs on the platform. In other words, teachers and students use ESP MOOCs through e-Portfolio-based teaching to assist after-class activities and improve teaching and learning efficiency. In the FiF-based teaching practice, ESP learning process is divided into three stages: (1) college English ESP learning plans and goals made by students themselves; (2) students' learning reflection and their works exhibition; (3) summary of students' performance and assessment of their MOOC-based learning. In the interaction between teachers and students, such functions as learning reminder, teachers' feedback, teacher-student discussion, students' learning reflection, and students' works submission have been developed to update and improve FiF Platform.

Assessment for learning. GCETAB particularly stresses that college English courses assessment should focus on formative assessment and bring the role of portfolio-based assessment into full play to support teaching and learning activities. This approach can provide students with the access to the assessment. More importantly, e-Portfolio-based assessment can record students' improvement and show to teachers and students how students' English proficiency has been improved. E-Portfolio-based FiF platform can make teaching easier: (1) as directors in the formative assessment, teachers can observe students' learning status at any time and give students immediate feedback; (2) as active learners, students can sign in the platform to learn ESP courses by themselves, assess their own performance and reflect their learning at any time.

3.3 Integrating MOOCs into Teaching for the Application and Sharing of ESP Resources

FiF Platform, combined with ESP MOOCs, is characterized by free sharing, including university-university sharing, teacher-teacher sharing, teacher-student sharing and student-student sharing. The present e-Portfolio-based FiF model promotes the integration of college English teaching between different universities in Guangdong Province and the development of individualized ESP courses.

According to the instruction of GCETAB, universities are the suppliers and beneficiaries of ESP MOOCs. Universities should exploit their ESP teachers' advantages and upload the completed MOOCs onto FiF Platform so that the similar teaching teams from different universities access to use. Those teachers can utilize MOOCs from FiF Platform in their daily teaching and give feedback to their universities and MOOCs suppliers. Of course, teachers and students use sharing resources based on e-Portfolio assessment. In the interactive process of using and sharing FiF Platform resources, the function of e-Portfolio-based assessment should be brought into full play in ESP courses. On the one hand, universities should make full use of MOOCs and improve the professionalism of ESP teaching and promote the innovation of teaching models; On the other hand, students' learning process should be the top priority, which can help students learn ESP courses in an active, independent and planned way. In the e-Portfolio-based learning process, students should conduct autonomous ESP learning within the framework of formative assessment. Moreover, resource sharing is very important. Teachers or students can set different ways for resource sharing, such as providing and sharing high-quality learning resources, giving feedback, discussing online, assessing each other and sharing learning diaries.

Since human resources and material resources in online open courses are mutually complemented and promoted, a system with certain teaching functions and a steady and orderly overall structure should be developed to ensure the interplay among different elements of resources, the integration of dynamic balance and ecologicalization among those elements (Bai, 2017). Therefore, in the e-Portfolio-based FiF model, the development and construction of college English ESP MOOCs should be promoted continuously; ESP MOOCs should be updated and the functions of FiF Platform should be improved based on the construction, application and sharing of the existing e-Portfolio platform and the feedback from different universities, teachers and students; the efficiency of applying e-Portfolio-based ESP MOOCs should be promoted through teaching experiments; the MOOC resources and the sharing model should be explored unremittingly among the co-construction universities to attract more universities to participate in the co-construction and sharing process, and to ensure that ESP MOOCs are fully utilized.

4. Conclusion

Based on an e-Portfolio-based platform and the concept of formative assessment, the present study, integrating college English ESP MOOCs with FiF Platform, tries to construct a model for teaching resource application and sharing. In this model, the practicability of college English MOOCs has been improved by e-Portfolios and the ESP MOOCs have better served the college English teaching. Since the function of teaching assessment is to test students' mastery of knowledge and encourage their learning, formative assessment should be used effectively through teacher assessment, peer assessment and self-assessment based on FiF Platform. Thus, the immediate e-Portfolios systematically reflect the process of students' participation in learning and assessment. More importantly, e-Portfolio-based formative assessment can record students' progress to offer teachers and students information about how students' ESP proficiency is improved, and enhance students' autonomy in learning. Meanwhile, the integration of e-Portfolios and MOOCs will advance the construction of college English ESP courses, and the model for applying and sharing MOOCs as the top priority will propel college English teaching in Guangdong Province toward reform. Of course, the present e-Portfolio-based model is still at its initial trial stage and the following teaching practices and empirical research will be carried out to provide more reliable basis for the feasibility and the enhancement of this model. Once the exploration and practice achieve success, it is expected to use the model widely in the college English ESP teaching in Guangdong Province and provide direct reference for the college English teaching reform nationwide.

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